

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00
INR-10 NSAE-00 ICA-11 /063 W
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R 192130Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8919
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS, CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 3733

E.O. 92: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, ES
SUBJ: PRESIDENTIAL INQUIRY RELATED TO COUP RUMORS
WREF: SAN SALVADOR 0674 AND 3625

1. ON JULY 18 I VISITED PRESIDENT ROMERO AT HIS REQUEST.
HE OPENED THE CONVERSATION BY SAYING HE HAD TWO MATTERS
TO DISCUSS WITH ME. AFTER WE HAD DISPOSED OF THE FIRST
TOPIC (BEING REPORTED SEPTTEL, HE INTRODUCED THE SECOND
BY TERMING IT A "THORNY SUBJECT" AND SAYING HE HOPED I
WOULD FORGIVE HIM IF HE APPROACHED IT VERY DIRECTLY,
PERHAPS EVEN "CRUDELY" BY ASKING ME "WHAT IS THE LINK
BETWEEN THE AMERICAN EMBASSY AND GENERAL MEDRANO?"

2. FROM THE PRESIDENT'S MANNER, HIS INTENSITY, AND
TO SOME EXTENT HIS UNEASINESS AS HE ASKED THE QUESTION,
IT WAS IMMEDIATELY APPARENT THAT HE HAD WRESTLED WITH
THE ISSUE OF WHETHER TO APPROACH ME ON THE SUBJECT.
ALSO, HOWEVER, THE INESCAPABLE IMPLICATION WAS THAT
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IN SOME WAY OR ANOTHER THE PRESIDENT HAD BECOME
CONCERNED OVER POSSIBLE POLITICAL COLLABORATION BETWEEN
OUR EMBASSY AND "CHELE" MEDRANO. (GENERAL JOSE ALBERTO
MEDRANO RETIRED FROM ACTIVE MILITARY DUTY IN 1972 WHEN
HE WAS COMMANDER OF THE NATIONAL GUARD. ONE OF THE
"HEROES" OF THE 1969 WAR WITH HONDURAS, HE IS FREQUENTLY
MENTIONED IN CONNECTION WITH "COUP RUMORS" AS BEING THE

TOUGH, NON-NONSENSE TYPE OF LEADER EL SALVADOR NEEDS
DURING THIS TIME OF POLITICAL UNREST.)

3. WITHOUT HESTIATION, I TOLD THE PRESIDENT THAT THERE
IS NO "LINK" AND THAT I IN FACT HAVE NEVER MET "CHELE"
MEDRANO. THE PRESIDENT APPEARED SURPRISED AND RELIEVED
BY THIS AND EXPLAINED THAT MEDRANO "IS BOASTING THAT HE
HAS THE BACKING OF THE AMERICAN EMBASSY FOR ANY MOVE
HE CHOOSES TO MAKE." I REPLIED THAT ANY SUCH CLAIM IS
"UTTER NONSENSE." I REITERATED THAT I HAD NEVER EVEN
LAIDEYES ON MEDRANO. TO BE FAIR ABOUT IT, I SAID I
WAS SURE OUR DEFENSE ATTACHE MUST KNOW HIM, I PRESUMED
THAT OTHER OFFICERS ON THE EMBASSY STAFF AND LONGER
AT THE POST THAN I HAD PROBABLY MET HIM, AND THAT
I SEEMED TO RECALL THAT OUR POLITICAL COUNSELOR HAD
BEEN AT LUNCH WITH HIM SOME MONTHS AGO (THE EXACT
DATE TURNS OUT TO HAVE BEEN FEBRUARY 8 AND THE LUNCHEON
WAS AT THE HOME OF DCM LUBENSKY). BUT I ASSURED THE
PRESIDENT THAT TO DEPICT ANY SUCH CASUAL RELATIONSHIP
AS "BACKING" BY THE EMBASSY WAS TOTALLY INACCURATE AND
UNREALISTIC. WE THEN HAD A BRIEF DISCUSSION ABOUT
GENERAL MEDRANO AND HIS PLACE IN HISTORY, AT THE END
OF WHICH THE PRESIDENT APPEARED COMPLETELY RELIEVED AND
SATISFIED.

4. I DECIDED TO TRY TO TURN THIS CONVERSATION TO SOME
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PURPOSE USEFUL FROM OUR OWN POINT OF VIEW. ACCORDINGLY,
I TOLD THE PRESIDENT THAT IT WAS A SOURCE OF SOME DISMAY
TO ME TO HEAR FROM TIME TO TIME COMPLETELY GROUNDLESS
REPORTS OF EMBASSY MEETINGS WITH OR SUPPORT OF VARIOUS
PERSONS AND GROUPS ON THE LOCAL SCENE. IN SOME CASES,
I NOTED, SUCH REPORTS ARE DISSEMINATED FOR THEIR OWN
PURPOSES BY THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED. IN OTHER CASES,
THEY SEEM TO BE GENERATED AND SPREAD TO DISCREDIT THE
EMBASSY. AS ONE EXAMPLE, I TOLD THE PRESIDENT, "SOME
OF YOUR MILITARY COLLEAGUES ARE EVEN NOW SAYING THAT
BECAUSE WE ARE IN TOUCH WITH THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS
IT PROVES WE ARE CONSPIRING AGAINST YOUR GOVERNMENT*" I
REMINDED THE PRESIDENT THAT I HAD FREQUENTLY DISCUSSED
WITH HIM OUR CONTACTS WITH THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS
AND OUR FEELING THAT IF WE COULD ENCOURAGE OR
FACILITATE A POLITICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT
AN RESPECTABLE PARTIES OF THE OPPOSITION, WE WOULD BE
DOING A USEFUL SERVICE TO THE CAUSE OF BOTH AS WELL AS
TO THE CAUSE OF POLITICAL STABILITY IN EL SALVADOR.
THE PRESIDENT AGREED THAT THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH
SUCH CONTACTS AND SMILINGLY REMINDED ME THAT I HAD SEEN
HIM TALK AT LENGTH WITH PDC AND MNR POLITICAL LEADERS AT

BOTH MY FOURTH OF JULY RECEPTION AND THE VENEZUELAN
AMBASSADOR'S FIFTH OF JULY CELEBRATION.

5. IN CONCLUDING THIS PART OF THE CONVERSATION, PRESIDENT
ROMERO OBSERVED THAT THE SALVADORAN MILITARY HAVE A
POINT OF VIEW WHICH IS VERY MUCH THEIR OWN. ON HIS
FREQUENT VISITS TO MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, HE IS PRESSED
TO TAKE STRONG, DECISIVE AND EVEN VIOLENT ACTION IN THE
INTERESTS OF LAW AND ORDER AND AGAINST TERRORISM AND
SUBVERSION. IN RESPONSE, HE SAID, HE TELLS MILITARY
OFFICERS THAT WHEN HE WAS ONE OF THEM HE FELT THE SAME
WAY. NOW, HOWEVER, FROM THE PRESIDENCY, THINGS LOOK
VERY DIFFERENT AND HE IS AWARE OF EVER SO MANY OTHER AND
COMPLICATING FACTORS NOT PERCEIVED BY THEM. HE TRIES
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GRADUALLY BUT STEADILY TO IMPRESS THIS REALITY UPON THE
OFFICERS WITH WHOM HE TALKS. WHEN I SUGGESTED THAT
THIS MUST BE A LONG, HARD ROAD, HE RESPONDED "IT SURE IS*"

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